

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L LISBON 5114

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ELAB, PO

SUBJ: DISCUSSION WITH MINISTER OF LABOR OF DRAFT UNION

DECREE LAW

REF: STATE 254282

SUMMARY: MINISTER OF LABOR INFORMED OF DEPARTMENT'S CONCERN REGARDING LIKELIHOOD THAT A UNITARY LABOR CONFEDERATION, AS FORESEEN BY DRAFT DECREE, WOULD FACILITATE COMMUNIST DOMINATION OF PORTUGUESE LABOR MOVEMENT. MINISTER MAINTAINED A MORE OPTIMISTIC VIEWPOINT. MEETING BELIEVED A USEFUL EXCHANGE OF VIEWS. END SUMMARY.

1. ON NOVEMBER 18 DCM CALLED ON MINISTER OF LABOR COSTA MARTINS TO INTRODUCE NEWLY ARRIVED LABOR ATTACHE. ALTHOUGH INTERVIEW HELD PRIOR TO RECEIPT OF REFTEL, DCM MENTIONED CONCERN OVER UNITARY ASPECT OF DRAFT DECREE DECREE ON UNION ORGANIZATION MINISTER INDICATED THAT DRAFT DECREE WAS THE RESULT OF AN EFFORT TO RECONCILE TWO IRRECONCILABLE GROUPS, I.E., THOSE WHO WANT A UNITARY CONFEDERATION AND THOSE WHO FAVOR A PLURALISTIC STRUCTURE. PROVISION OF DRAFT DECREE ALLOWING UNIONS REPRESENTING MORE THAN 50 PERCENT OF UNIONIZED LABOR FORCE TO CREATE A UNITARY CONFEDERATION OPEN TO THE VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION OF ALL UNIONS WAS AN ATTEMPT AT A COMPROMISE.

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2. DURING LUNCH WITH MINISTER OF LABOR ON NOV. 20, LABATT RAISED

ISSUE OF UNITARY CONFEDERATION, MAKING POINTS CITED BY REFTEL. MINISTER CONCEDED THAT COMMUNISTS PRESENTLY IN DOMINANT ROLE AT INTERSINDICAL BUT ASSERTED THAT GREAT BULK OF PORTUGUESE WORKERS ARE NOT COMMUNISTS. HE DID NOT BELIEVE THE DECREE WOULD FAVOR THE INTERESTS OF ANY PARTICULAR PARTY. HE PERSONALLY DOES NOT BELIEVE IN ANY PARTY'S IDEOLOGY BUT WISHES TO CREATE AN ORGANIZATION STRONG ENOUGH TO REPRESENT WORKERS' INTERESTS.

3. LABATT NOTED THAT DRAFT DECREE'S PROVISIONS AUTHORIZING UNIONS AND FEDERATIONSTO HAVE "CONTACTS" WITH INTERNATIONAL LABOR ORGANIZATIONS BUT PERMITTING ONLY THE CONFEDERATION TO "AFFILIATE" WITH INTERNATIONAL GROUPINGS COULD SERIOUSLY LIMIT PROGRAMS OF USEFUL GROUPS SUCH AS THE INTERNATIONAL TRADE SECRETARIATS. MINISTER SEEMED UNAWARE OF INTERNATIONAL TRADE SECRETARIATS AND REAFFIRMED THAT HIS FREQUENT CONTACTS WITH WORKERS HAVE SHOWN HIM THAT IT IS OFTEN NOT INTERSINDICAL WHICH IS MOST EFFECTIVELY REPRESENTED. HE SAID THAT THE MINISTRY HAS RECEIVED STATEMENTS FROM SOME UNIONS OPPOSING ASPECTS OF THE PROPOSED LABOR DECREE. THE MINISTER INDICATED THAT THREE SEPARATE DRAFTS AND BEEN PREPARED AND THE DRAFT PRESENTLY BEING CONSIDERED IS THE BEST COMPROMISE.

4. THE MINISTER NEITHER CONFIRMED NOR DENIED THAT THE COMMUNISTS WOULD HAVE THE BEST CHANCE OF DOMINATING ANY FUTURE LABOR CONFEDERATION. HE INSTEAD MAINTAINED THAT THE SITUATION IS NOT AS SERIOUS AS PROJECTED BECAUSE PORTUGUESE UNIONS ARE WEAK AND DISORGANIZED AFTER 48 YEARS OF THE CORPORATIVE STATE SYSTEM. THEREFORE, THE WORKERS LOOK TOHIM AND TO THE MINISTRY RATHER THAN TO THEIR UNIONS IN ORDER TO RESOLVE THEIR PROBLEMS. LIKEWISE, MANAGEMENT TURNS TO HIM WITH ITS LABOR PROBLEMS. THUS IT IS THE MIFISTRY WHICH PLAYS THE KEY ROLE IN LABOR RELATIONS IN PORTUGAL AND NOT THE UNIONS. LABATT EXPRESSED CONCERN AS TO WHETHER MINISTER'S OPTIMISM JUSTIFIED IN VIEW OF OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRIES' EXPERIENCE WITH COMMUNIST-DOMINATED LABOR CONFEDERATIONS. EXCHANGE ENDED WITH COOL HEADS ALL-ROUND ALTHOUGH MINISTER SOMEWHAT EDGY AT ONEPOINT IN CONVERSATION.

5. MINISTER GIVES IMPRESSION OF A YOUNG, VAIN, AMBITIOUS PERSON FULL OF ENERGY AND GOOD INTENTIONS BUT WITHOUT POLITICAL SOPHISTICATION, ACADEMIC PREPARATION, OR AWARENESS OF HIS OWN CONFIDENTIAL

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LIMITATIONS. HIS RATHER SIMPLISTIC APPROACH TO A COMPLEX, POLITICALLY-SENSITIVE AREA IS BELIEVED AN ACCURATE REFLECTION OF HIS OWN CONVICTIONS RATHER THAN A MASK FOR DARKER MOTIVES. THE MINISTER IS FROM THE ALGARVE, ONE OF PORTUGAL'S POOREST REGIONS, AND AS AN AIR FORCE SERGEANT WAS SELECTED TO ATTEND THE 4-YEAR MILITARY ACADEMY COURSE. MINISTER IS POPULAR WITH PUBLIC DUE TO HIS ACCESSABILITY, HIS FREQUENT PERSONAL APPEARANCES AND HIS DEMONSTRATED "MOXIE" INA DEMANDING JOB THAT MANY THOUGHT

WOULD QUICKLY PROVE TO B TOO BIG FOR HIM. THIS IS HIS MAIN
CHANCE AND HE IS OUT TO MAKE THE MOST OF IT.

6. WHILE EMBASSY IS NOT OPTIMISTIC THAT DRAFT DECREE LAW WILL
BE MODIFIED ON BASIS OF THIS CONVERSATION, MINISTER HAS BEEN
GIVEN CLEAR UNDERSTANDING OF DEPARTMENT'S CONCERN.
SCOTT

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